

ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT TRADE AND COMPETITIVENESS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS IN VIETNAM AND REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Vietnam's agricultural exports share to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is rising as local firms grab opportunities to enhance the export of agricultural products to member nations. However, the agricultural export sector is encountering several barriers. Currently, scholars have paid keen attention to the quality of Vietnam's agricultural exports, to catch the international market trade share of the firms, to the factors influencing Vietnamese agricultural export volume, and to strategies to enhance trade expansion in the export business. These factors are vital for policymakers, farmers, and exporters to develop plans to improve Vietnam's agricultural exports. The results show that Vietnam's agricultural product exports to RCEP countries' markets have gradually increased from 2001 to 2021 from US\$ 1035.1 million in 2001 to US\$ 111.3 million in 2021. However, due to the impact of COVID 19, Vietnam's agricultural exports tended to decrease in 2019 - 2020 and increase again in 2021. Among RCEP countries, exports of agricultural products to the United States play an important role. Exports to the United States will reach US\$ 8.66 billion in 2022.

Keywords: *Current situation, competitiveness, Agriculture, RCEP countries.*

Received: 15 April 2024; revised: 25 July 2024; accepted: 12 August 2024.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnamese government has made substantial advancements in trade and investment connections between Vietnam and other East Asian economies since the early 1990s. Vietnam currently exports its agricultural products to emerging nations to increase export diversity and improve economic performance [1]. Vietnamese government is promoting export diversification to improve innovation, enhance quality, increase revenue, and foster economic growth over time.

Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2006, which led to a rise in its agricultural exports. The value of Vietnam's agricultural exports to RCEP nations has shown a consistent increase from 2018 to 2020. Factors such as money, investment, labor, technology, infrastructure quality, and government policy effectiveness are the main drivers of any country to boost growth. However, Vietnam's agricultural exports to this market are currently low as compared to the trade potential for exporting agricultural products to RCEP. The

government consistently implements steps to establish business links with neighboring countries. They have expedited their economic integration with East Asian economies by actively participating in the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and ASEAN + 1 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). On November 15, 2020, Vietnam officially ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in Ha Noi, Vietnam to strengthen its economic framework. The approval of the RCEP has effectively countered the prevailing sentiments of anti - globalization, trade protectionism and unilateralism. This has also bolstered global trust in sustainable economic growth [2]. Literature such as Tran, N. T., Tran, T. K (2023) [3], Wang, F (2023) [4], describe that the academic community is primarily focused on evaluating the compatibility and global competitiveness of agricultural product trade among RCEP members, as well as analyzing the impact of RCEP on agricultural exports to RCEP members. Kiyabo, Isaga (2020) [5] utilized the concept of revealed comparative advantage in addition to other variables to perform a comparative analysis. Jiang, Y., Husin, H (2023) [6] utilized the concept of revealed comparative advantage in addition to other variables to perform a comparative analysis. Jiang, Y., Husin, H (2023) [6] employed the GTAP model to simulate and assess the collective reduction in tariffs within the member nations of the 6RCEP region in addition, several scholars such as Masood *et al.* (2023) [7], Muhammad *et al.* (2020) [8], G. Ngoma (2020) [9] employ statistical models e.g., fixed effect pooled least square, poisson pseudo maximum likelihood panel least square, generalized method of moment panel least square, panel two - stage least square. Multiple factors such as gross domestic product, per capita gross domestic product and geographical distance on agricultural product exports are identified. The research undertaken by, T. A. Ajayi (2023) [10] supports the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis, which argues that diversification is necessary for the economic progress of developing nations. Australia and Canada's robust agricultural exports result from their effective expansion and diversification of product portfolios. It is vital to evaluate the level of

agricultural export diversification in the member nations of the RCEP.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Data collection

The data utilized in this analysis was collected from sources such as the World Bank Development Indicators (WDI), center for Research and Expertise on the World Economy (CEPII) gravity dataset and UN Comtrade. The data covers the period from 2001 to 2021 and focuses on countries that are part of the RCEP. This study uses the interpolation approach to tackle the insufficient data from some countries.

2.2. Estimation methodology

2.2.1. Market share (MS)

MS stands for international market share index. The MS index measures the proportion of a nation's agricultural products that are sold on the global market; it serves as an indicator of the nation's agricultural progress and competitiveness on an international scale. The greater the MS value, the greater the international market share and competitiveness of a nation's agricultural products. Formulating the MS index is as follows:

$$MS = \frac{X_{ij}}{X_{iw}}$$

Among these, X_{ij} denotes the export value of i distinct agricultural product varieties that are exported by country j , while X_{iw} signifies the global export value of i agricultural product varieties. In this study, we assume that the variable y_1 represents coffee and tea exports, while y_2 and y_3 represent cereal exports and oil, food grain products, and medicinal plants exports, respectively, for the purpose of estimate.

2.2.2. Trade competitive index (TC index)

The TC index measures trade competitiveness. The TC index is used as a tool to assess the efficiency of agricultural product production on a domestic and global scale. The values range from -1 to 1. The positive value of the TC index indicates that the country has a net export competitive advantage in agriculture. On the other hand, it could be claimed that it creates a competitive

disadvantage. A higher index value indicates a stronger competitive advantage. The formula for determining the TC index is given below.

$$TC\ index = (X_i - X_j)/(X_i + X_j)$$

Among these, X_i indicates the value of agricultural items exported by nation i , whereas X_j represents the value of agricultural products imported by country i .

2.2.3. Trade dependence

This is a method to measure the importance of a partner country for the home country in a trade relationship is to calculate the ratio of the trade value with partner to home country total trade value therefore, the ratio of a country's trade value TV_{bj} to its GDP_j is used to measure a country's dependence on trade.

$$Trade\ dependence = \sum TV_{bj} / GDP_j$$

2.2.4. Reveled comparative advantage index (RCAI)

Balassa established the RCAI, which is generated using trade data. Because the trade performance of agricultural products is the ultimate expression of their competitiveness, the RCAI demonstrates the comparative advantage of agricultural products and, more importantly, it shows the level of agricultural competitive advantage through the trade performance of agricultural products. The RCAI formula can be represented as:

$$(RCAI)_{kl} = (X_{kl}/X_k) / (X_{wl}/X_w)$$

The variable X_{kl} denotes the export value of the k product in the l country (or region), X_k represents the total export value of product k from country l to all markets, whereas X_w represents the aggregate export volume of all products in the l th country (or region). On the other hand, X_{wl} represents the global output of the k product, and l represents the entire export value of all products worldwide.

2.2.5. Trade complementary space

The total trade complementary index (TCI) quantifies the degree of similarity between a nation's export supply and the import demand of

one of its trading counterparts. The index can be calculated using the following method:

$$TCI = \left[\frac{X_i^k}{X_i^t} \right] / \left[\frac{X_j^k}{X_j^t} \right]$$

TCI is the complementarity index between countries i and j . $(\frac{X_i^k}{X_i^t} / \frac{X_j^k}{X_j^t})$ represents the export revealed comparative advantage of country i in the market, while $(\frac{X_j^k}{X_j^t} / \frac{X_i^k}{X_i^t})$ represents the import revealed comparative advantage of country j . X_i^k represents the export volume of product k in country i , X_i^t represents the total export volume of all products in country i , X_w^k represents the export volume of all products in RCEP countries, and X_w^t represents the total export volume of all products in these countries. X_j^k represents the import volume of product k in country j , and X_j^t represents the total import volume of all products in country j . In dynamic network analysis, θ^k represents the export share of product k in the RCEP market.

3. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Analysis of the current situation of agricultural product trade between Vietnam and RCEP countries

3.1.1 The scale of agricultural product trade between Vietnam and RCEP countries

Vietnam's agricultural exports to RCEP increased significantly from US\$ 1035.1 million in 2001 to US\$ 111.3 million in 2021. Collectively, these nations accounted for over sixty percent of Vietnam's agricultural exports. Vietnam's exports to trading partners of the RCEP countries consist of food grains, equipment, and manufacturing supplies. The development was further facilitated by the influx of foreign investment from partners of RCEP nations. Japan, China and Korea are Vietnam's main trade partners in RCEP. Furthermore, they account for a significant

majority of Vietnam's imports and are also gained for over forty - five percent of Vietnam's exports to RCEP states. Currently, the level of trade between Australia, New Zealand, and numerous ASEAN nations with an income is rather low. Conversely, there is a noticeable upward trend in trade activity, suggesting a significant opportunity for trade to strengthen economic connections (Figures 1, 2

and 3). The growth can be attributed to the increase in Vietnam's exports to RCEP nations, which is a direct outcome of the inflow of foreign investments and innovations in technology, the policies implemented by the Vietnamese government and the bilateral trade agreements, [2, 3, 11,12].

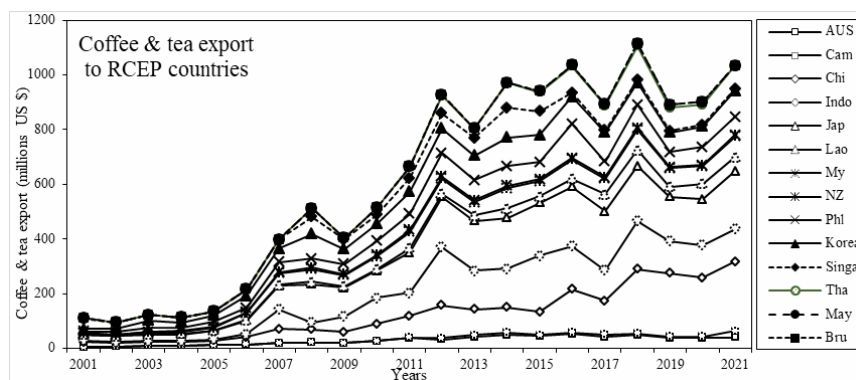


Figure 1. A comparative analysis of coffee & tea export to RCEP countries (2001 - 2021)

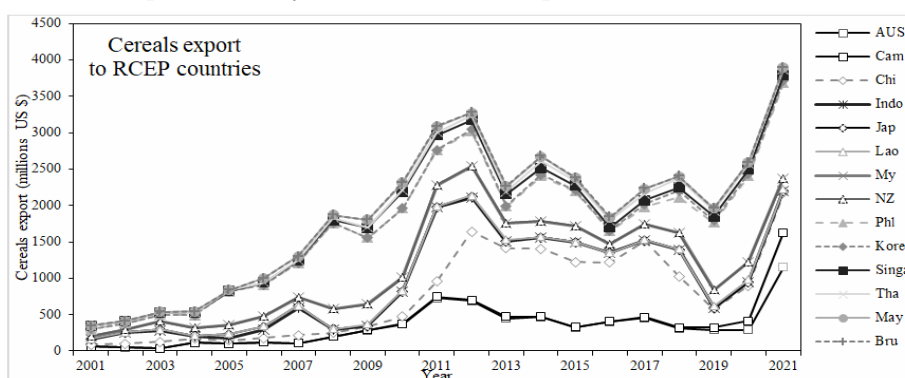


Figure 2. A comparative analysis of cereals export to RCEP countries (2001 - 2021)

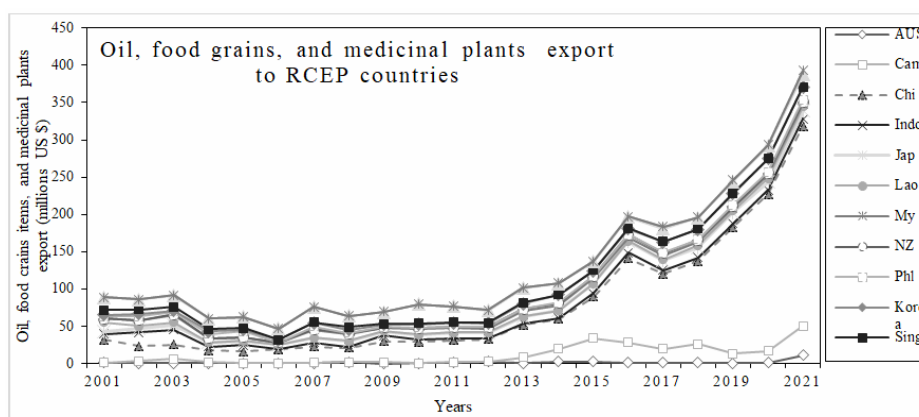


Figure 3. A comparative analysis of oil, food grains items and medicinal plants export to RCEP countries (2001 - 2021)

From 2001 to 2021, Vietnam witnessed a steady growth in its agricultural exports to member nations of the RCEP. Concurrently with notable alterations in the export composition, there has been a rise in exports to countries that are part of the RCEP. This shift has involved a transformation from agricultural and unprocessed commodity goods to manufactured commodities [3, 13, 14]. In the early 2000s, agricultural, petroleum, and mineral goods constituted approximately 66% of Vietnam's total export volume [15]. Consequently, the Vietnamese government's recent initiatives to entice foreign direct investment from RCEP member nations and encourage the participation of multinational corporations in the agricultural sector have resulted in a significant increase in the export of tea, coffee, grains and various food and medicinal plants. However, there is still a paucity of studies on the factors that determine the export of agricultural products to the RCEP market, specifically its effect on Vietnam's export diversification, which is insufficient. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature by analyzing the factors that influence the export of agricultural products between Vietnam and RCEP nations using a gravity model. Additionally, the study aims to assess the impact of export diversification on RCEP countries

3.1.2. Agricultural product trade structure between Vietnam and RCEP countries

Vietnam's government has maintained control over the electrical, telecommunications, transportation and agricultural sectors through its socialist market economy, while also promoting collaborations between state corporations, international companies, and member states such as RCEP. Following Vietnam's agreement with the World Trade Organisation in 2007 and its subsequent signing of free trade agreements with various countries and regions, there has been a notable surge in the influx of foreign direct investment into the country [1]. This influx has led to the transfer of technology and subsequent improvements in productivity. At first, Vietnam's agricultural exports consisted mainly of low-value-

added products, mostly from raw materials. However, with the move of smart technologies and other electronic device manufacturing to Vietnam, the emphasis has now switched towards higher-value-added commodities. The lack of explicit sanctions imposed on Vietnam during the trade dispute between the United States and China has also facilitated these transfers, resulting in a rise in exports to the United States. Imports are on the rise due to the acquisition of raw materials from China, South Korea, Japan and other nations for the use of smart technologies in the agricultural sector and other industries [16].

The RCEP provides opportunities for domestic enterprises to enhance the exportation of agricultural products to member nations. It ranks in the top 15 countries worldwide in terms of exporting agricultural, forestry and fishery products. More than 190 countries worldwide have successfully received Vietnamese agricultural commodities, generating a substantial export revenue of US\$ 48.6 billion in 2021. Agricultural growth experienced a 2.78% increase compared to the same period in the previous year, while the exports of agro-forestry and fisheries goods amounted to US\$ 27.88 billion, representing a 13.9% year-on-year gain. The RCEP is a free trade agreement (FTA) comprising 10 participating ASEAN members and five partner states, namely Japan, the Republic of Korea, China, Australia, and New Zealand. With a GDP of US\$ 26.2 trillion, accounting for around 30% of global GDP and a population of 2.3 billion people, representing around 30% of the world's population, this pact holds the title of being the largest free trade agreement in the world [12]. The RCEP will offer agricultural companies increased opportunities to expand their market reach and boost their exports, especially in sectors where the country possesses a competitive edge, such as rice, coffee, pepper, cashew nuts, seafood, timber and wood products. Vietnamese agricultural products will face competition from imported items from member nations in the domestic market. Enhancing the structure of different technical regulations and obstacles in the trade of agro-forestry-fishery

products will enhance the agricultural exports of RCEP members.

However, as stated in this study, a trading structure depends on the types of agricultural products, such as fruit, vegetables, pharmaceutical products, etc. Modifications in the strategies employed by these specific firms can exert a significant influence on the agricultural productivity of an entire country. To mitigate this situation and ensure sustained economic growth, it is crucial to diversify the risks associated with a trading framework that is dependent on specific export commodities. An

additional noteworthy issue is the limited availability of energy in Vietnam, and the production of domestic natural gas and other possible remedies are seen as essential for addressing this problem in the agricultural sector. Urgent actions are required to effectively tackle these issues and increase the trade potential of Vietnam to RCEP members.

3.2. Analysis of competitiveness of agricultural products in Vietnam and RCEP countries

3.2.1. Market share

Table 1. Market share

Years	MS for y1 (in the RCEP market)	MS for y2 (in the RCEP market)	MS for y3 (in the RCEP market)
2001	0.176	0.416	0.738
2002	0.169	0.417	0.704
2003	0.169	0.550	0.647
2004	0.118	0.374	0.544
2005	0.128	0.486	0.467
2006	0.134	0.594	0.544
2007	0.161	0.690	0.397
2008	0.159	0.530	0.245
2009	0.159	0.457	0.565
2010	0.172	0.517	0.472
2011	0.159	0.472	0.417
2012	0.172	0.677	0.550
2013	0.490	0.589	0.374
2014	0.241	0.268	0.486
2015	0.191	0.267	0.621

2016	0.230	0.124	0.387
2017	0.361	0.258	0.491
2018	0.257	0.239	0.448
2019	0.105	0.277	0.523
2020	0.118	0.420	0.594

Table 1 displays the market share of Vietnam's agricultural exports, specifically indicating that in 2001, the proportion of y3 (oil, food grain products, and medicinal plants exports) was above that of y2 (cereal exports). However, over time, this share rapidly declined and reached a minimum level of 0.242 by 2008. Simultaneously, the market share of y2 has constantly grown till 2012. In general, we can say that the share of y3 and y2 products exhibits a small but consistent trend, with values ranging from 0.176 in 2001 to 0.118 in 2020. Product y1 needs to be improved, as its market share in RCEP is much smaller than that of y3 and y2.

3.2.2. Tarde competitive index (TC index)

According to Table 2, the TC index for product y1 exhibits a greater value compared to products y3 and y2. Furthermore, when comparing y3 to y2, y3 indicates superior performance in the TC index. In 2007, the TC

index of Vietnam's agricultural goods had a downward trajectory, which persisted until 2012. Subsequently, y3 continues to have a good trajectory. In a similar vein, we observed patterns of conduct in product 2. In general, y1 performed well till 2019 but had a decline in 2020. A TC index value below zero signifies a prevailing decrease in competitiveness, whereas a positive trend signifies an escalation in market competition. The negative value signifies a low level of agricultural production efficiency, while the positive value indicates high international trade levels resulting from economies of scale. However, the positive and lower values suggest that there are distinct advantages in the production efficiency of agricultural products in this region, but overall competitiveness is gradually declining. In general, the findings indicate that these products possess the ability to enhance their overall quality and market competitiveness.

Table 2. Trade competitive index

Years	TC index for y1	TC index for y2	TC index for y3
2001	0.781	0.180	0.599
2002	0.808	0.360	0.596
2003	0.833	0.401	0.415
2004	0.871	0.367	0.322
2005	0.747	0.563	0.328
2006	0.685	0.468	0.034
2007	0.822	0.520	-0.076

2008	0.702	0.408	-0.038
2009	0.694	-0.309	-0.111
2010	0.285	0.297	-0.168
2011	0.702	0.866	-0.468
2012	0.528	0.911	0.155
2013	0.509	0.531	0.614
2014	0.385	0.254	0.296
2015	0.455	0.350	0.394
2016	0.604	0.133	0.112
2017	0.604	0.650	0.218
2018	0.689	0.706	0.508
2019	-0.218	0.242	0.482

3.2.3. Trade dependence

Table 3 illustrates the trade dependence indices for y1, y2 and y3. This suggests that y2 items have a higher degree of trade dependent on the RCEP market than y3 and y1. When we compare y3 and y1, y1 products rely more on the RCEP market than y3. The overall trend of y2, y3, and y1 indicates a lower trend in 2001, which steadily increases until 2009 (1.478) for y2

production. y3 and y1 have exhibited similar behaviors. In 2019, the trend of all products (y2, y3 and y1) indicates reduced dependence on RCEP products over time. This may be owing to Vietnam's commercial connection with RCEP countries, in which the country exports largely raw resources and imports mostly manufactured items of agricultural products.

Table 3. Trade dependence

Years	Trade dependence for y1	Trade dependence for y2	Trade dependence for y3
2001	0.116	0.446	0.084
2002	0.094	0.423	0.091
2003	0.110	0.503	0.077
2004	0.094	0.433	0.054
2005	0.113	0.672	0.039
2006	0.176	0.740	0.043

2007	0.278	0.905	0.048
2008	0.307	1.077	0.026
2009	0.260	1.478	0.037
2010	0.384	1.461	0.055
2011	0.374	0.982	0.037
2012	0.524	1.312	0.068
2013	0.313	0.517	0.052
2014	0.241	0.244	0.031
2015	0.258	0.247	0.031
2016	0.293	0.249	0.022
2017	0.379	0.306	0.026
2018	0.235	0.278	0.026
2019	0.323	0.519	0.209

3.2.4. Revealed comparative advantage index (RCAI)

Table 4 displays the RCAI values of the agricultural products (y1, y2 and y3), illustrating diverse patterns of change seen throughout the 20 - year duration under investigation. Table 4 shows that

the RCAI values of y3 and y2 show similar patterns compared to the y1 product. According to the data, the export competitiveness of y1 exhibited a relatively low but consistent pattern. This observation demonstrates that every product possesses the potential to enhance market competitiveness.

Table 4. Revealed comparative advantage index

Years	RCAI for y1	RCAI for y2	RCAI for y3
2001	0.176	0.416	0.938
2002	0.169	0.417	1.014
2003	0.169	0.550	0.847
2004	0.118	0.374	0.844
2005	0.128	0.486	0.467
2006	0.134	0.594	0.944

2007	0.161	0.690	0.397
2008	0.159	0.530	0.245
2009	0.159	0.457	0.565
2010	0.172	0.517	0.472
2011	0.159	0.472	0.180
2012	0.172	0.677	1.678
2013	0.490	0.589	1.213
2014	0.241	0.268	1.340
2015	0.191	0.267	0.621
2016	0.230	0.124	0.387
2017	0.361	0.258	0.891
2018	0.257	0.239	0.448
2019	0.105	0.277	5.947
2020	0.118	0.420	3.310

3.2.5. Trade complementary index (TCI)

If the comparative advantages of each product in each country are equal, then the TCI is 1. If we set 1 as the threshold value for the TCI then TCI values greater than 1 imply that it has considerable Agri-trade complementarity between

the two countries. If $TCI < 1$, it indicates low complementarity. As the value decreases, the level of complementarity in the RCEP market decreases. The TCI has a falling trend across y1, y2 and y3, indicating a consistent pattern across all products.

Table 5. Trade complimentary index

Years	TCI for y1	TCI for y2	TCI for y3
2001	1.299	1.452	0.588
2002	0.824	0.716	0.548
2003	0.647	0.642	0.485
2004	0.605	0.503	0.672
2005	0.781	0.373	0.689

2006	0.933	0.290	0.508
2007	0.409	0.230	0.327
2008	0.231	0.232	0.138
2009	0.208	0.201	0.137
2010	0.092	0.133	0.111
2011	0.077	0.191	0.035
2012	0.057	0.141	0.023
2013	1.312	0.521	0.645
2014	0.974	0.401	0.480
2015	0.361	0.295	0.313
2016	0.236	0.283	0.167
2017	0.232	0.191	0.170
2018	0.129	0.133	0.140

4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Vietnam's agricultural product exports to RCEP countries' markets have gradually increased from 2001 to 2021 from US\$ 111.3 million in 2001 to US\$ 1035.1 million in 2021. However, due to the impact of COVID 19, Vietnam's agricultural exports tended to decrease in 2019 - 2020 and increase again in 2021. Among RCEP countries, exports of agricultural products to the United States play an important role. Exports to the United States will reach US\$ 15 billion in 2024.

However, the export turnover of agriculture, forestry, and fishery as a proportion of Vietnam's total exports is on a downward trend, which shows that the growth rate of export turnover of agriculture, forestry, and fishery has not kept pace with the overall growth rate of exports. The average growth rate of agriculture, forestry, and fishery export turnover during 2017 - 2022 reached 9.87%, which is lower than the average growth rate

of Vietnam's total export turnover during 2017 - 2022.

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